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News

## Kids, Soldiers Should Be Focus of Fluorochemicals Study, Advocates Say

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- Toxic substances agency meets with New Hampshire residents Sept. 20 on fluorochemicals exposure
- Advocates seek tests family doctors could use to monitor long-term health

A group of New Hampshire moms wants to make sure that a future federal study of fluorochemicals covers children's and soldiers' exposures that could result in cancer, infertility, or other health problems.

"My son was exposed prenatally and until he was more than 5 years old," said Alayna Davis, who lives near the Pease International Tradeport in Portsmouth, N.H., where a pilot study paving the way for a national survey will be undertaken next year.

"Will this impact his ability to have children? I don't know," Davis told Bloomberg Environment Sept. 18.

She and two other mothers advocating for more health research and medical guidance had children in day care centers for years at the Tradeport—a former Air Force base that now houses 250,000 square feet of office and industrial space for banks and financial advisers, and two day care centers.

Plans for the pilot study will be discussed during a Sept. 20 [meeting](#) with federal health officials.

The group of chemicals, called per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS chemicals have been detected in drinking water sources serving more than 6 million Americans. Their presence results from decades of use in products ranging from firefighting foams used on military bases to medical, electronics, and oil and gas drilling equipment.

## Companies in the Crosshairs

Some studies suggest that fluorochemicals can make it harder to have children. Exposure to fluorochemicals at sufficient concentrations has consistently been linked with high cholesterol, which can lead to heart disease. Some studies also have found exposure may increase risk of Type 1 diabetes, reduced immune function, thyroid disease, and testicular and kidney cancer.

Fears about such diseases have fueled multimillion-dollar lawsuits against companies that have made or used the chemicals, including 3M Co., the Chemours Co., Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics, and footwear manufacturer Wolverine World Wide Inc.

The Testing for Pease advocacy group that Davis helped found, has pushed for a first-time national study of the health effects resulting from fluorochemicals exposure, with a focus on children, firefighters, and military personnel.

## Residents Speak Out

The Sept. 20 meeting will allow officials from the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to hear from local residents that work on, or live near, the Tradeport.

Topics on the agenda include ATSDR's plans to test exposure surveys, strategies to recruit study participants, and other details that could be adopted for a broader national survey.

Higher rates of cancer found in occupants of the nearby Pease Air National Guard facility also will be discussed at the request of local residents, Andrea Amico, a co-founder of Testing for Pease told Bloomberg Environment.

Both Davis and Amico worked with third co-founder Michelle Dalton on years of advocacy that finally resulted in ATSDR receiving \$10 million this year to proceed with the study.

The U.S. Senate provided an additional \$10 million in a fiscal year 2019 funding bill it approved Sept. 18. Amico also will testify as a witness at a Senate Homeland Security and Governmental affairs hearing Sept. 26.

The proposed Pease study would take a "snapshot" of the community's exposure to PFAS chemicals to see if it flags health concerns.

## Beginning, Not End

That one-time snapshot marks a beginning, but it shouldn't be the government's sole commitment, Davis and Amico said.

Since 2014, when the community first learned it had been drinking water containing fluorochemicals, residents have worked with scientists to learn about the chemicals.

They pushed for tests that showed resident's blood levels of three chemicals perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS), and perfluorohexane sulfonic acid (PFHxS) were higher than the national average. In addition, they worked with Boston's Northeastern University to hold a 2017 national PFAS conference that Davis said attracted participants from around the country.

## Medical Care Questions

The knowledge developed over the last four years means local residents want to know, for example, what specific medical tests their doctors can order to monitor their families' health for potential illnesses that could result from PFAS exposure, Amico said. Amico said such knowledge should be "the bare minimum" federal researchers provide.

If ATSDR's initial snapshot of the community's health raises concerns, local residents want that agency or perhaps another to consider further research and medical monitoring, Amico said.

She also wants to know whether there are plans to address the health concerns retired military, current National Guard personnel, and local firefighters who could have been exposed to PFAS on the job.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry proposed excluding occupationally exposed individuals from the Pease study.

There could be a good scientific reason for that, according to Amico. But, the servicemen and -women who drank PFAS-contaminated water for years and dealt with the chemicals as they worked "are a population that needs its own study," she said.

"We need to do a better job taking care of our military people," Amico said.

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